

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE FRANK A. LoBIONDO CHAIRMAN -
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
DEEPWATER IMPLEMENTATION
JUNE 14, 2006

The Subcommittee is meeting this afternoon to review the Coast Guard's Deepwater program and the service's revised Deepwater implementation schedule.

The Coast Guard's Integrated Deepwater System is designed to replace or modernize approximately 90 ships and 200 aircraft currently utilized by the service to carry out missions more than 50 miles from shore. The new assets obtained under this program are extremely important and will greatly expand the Coast Guard's ability to perform its many traditional and homeland security missions.

The original Deepwater implementation plan and asset mixture were devised prior to September 11th, and consequently, the plan has been revised to take into account the Coast Guard's greater homeland security responsibilities. It was important for the service to do this and I am pleased they did. Nevertheless, it is my duty to evaluate the plan, and I have some concerns.

First, I am disappointed that the plan extends the time period for acquiring the new assets from 20 to 25 years. Every year we delay the purchase of new assets the men and women of the Coast Guard and our taxpayers lose because the cost of maintaining legacy assets significantly increases, eating more and more of the money available to purchase replacement assets; and newer, more capable assets are not available to improve the performance and safety of the service's operations.

My second major concern is with the workhorse of the Coast Guard's fleet — the 110-foot patrol boats. These boats are rapidly failing resulting in an estimated patrol boat readiness gap of nearly 20,000 hours annually from 2008 through 2012. Exasperating the problem, are the failures surrounding the development of the replacement to the 110, the Fast Response Cutter, as well as the termination of the agreement with the Navy to provide the Coast Guard with 179 foot patrol ships. I am especially interested in hearing from the Commandant how he plans to manage the readiness gap, what progress has been made in fixing the design problems in the FRC, as well as the status of the search for an "off-the-shelf" patrol boat design as an alternative to the FRC.

Finally, I want to formally congratulate Admiral Allen on becoming the service's 23rd Commandant. I can not think of a better choice to lead the men and women of the Coast Guard during these challenging times. I look forward hearing your testimony today and I look forward to working with you to improve the service and its capabilities.